

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia.** *Bernardo de Gálvez: Spanish Hero of the American Revolution.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 616 pp. \$38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4696-4079-2.

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**Published on** H-War (January, 2019)

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In January 2014, Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL) introduced legislation to confer honorary citizenship, “the highest honor the U.S. government can bestow upon a foreign citizen,” on Bernardo de Gálvez for his role in securing the independence of the United States (p. 2). After the resolution was approved by the House of Representatives and the Senate, it was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 16, 2014. Joining Winston Churchill, Raoul Wallenberg, William and Hannah Penn, Mother Teresa, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Casimir Pulaski, Gálvez became the eighth person to be granted honorary citizenship, an honor neither lightly conferred nor frequently granted. Unlike the other illustrious members of this group, who are routinely discussed in many social studies and history classes, Gálvez remains a bit of an enigma to most Americans, due to the paucity of scholarship about the energetic governor of Spanish Louisiana who defeated the British at the Siege of Pensacola in 1781. Spanish historian and diplomat Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia begins to rectify this deficiency with *Bernardo de Gálvez: Spanish Hero of the American Revolution*, the first comprehensive biography of Gálvez. The author succeeds in “cast[ing] a light on the last decades of the Spanish Empire in North America and on the role of Spain in the American Revolutionary War by bringing to life the world of Bernardo de Gálvez” (p. 8).

Quintero Saravia’s massive undertaking, which makes use of Spanish, Mexican, and American archival resources, is divided into eight chapters that chronologically examine Gálvez’s life. According to the author, Gálvez’s life “could be cast as an adventure novel” (p. 2). Gálvez’s life also “offers a view of an individual deeply

influenced by Enlightenment values.” He was born into an impoverished but hard-working family in southern Spain. Due to the patronage of his uncle, who enjoyed a brilliant political career and served as Spain’s minister of the Indies from 1776 to 1787, Gálvez was given important positions at a young age, which allowed him to “demonstrate his unusually strong military, administrative, and political talents” (p. 5). In 1769, he arrived in Spanish America and fought “as a volunteer captain” in the campaign against the Apache in Nueva Vizcaya (p. 44). From 1777 to 1783, he served as the governor of Spanish Louisiana, a vast territory acquired by Spain at the end of the French and Indian War. In March 1778, Gálvez “announced that Spanish neutrality ‘would not compromise its hospitality’ to the Americans” (p. 139). Keeping to this promise, he was responsible for “channeling most of the covert aid provided by the Spanish government to the American rebels” (p. 4). The two-month Siege of Pensacola, which captured the capital of British West Florida, earned Gálvez a promotion to the rank of lieutenant general, “the highest in the Spanish army at the time” (p. 241). Gálvez’s military success at the Siege of Pensacola denied the British the ability to encircle the American rebels from the south, while simultaneously providing the revolutionaries a vital conduit for supplies. Gálvez spent the last two years of his life as the viceroy of New Spain.

Almost half of the book, which is enhanced with numerous photos, charts, and graphs, is devoted to scholarly apparatus. Whereas almost a hundred pages are allocated to the bibliography, an invaluable source for students and scholars, more than a hundred are devoted to

endnotes that have been meticulously documented. Especially impressive is the readability of the book. Although Quintero Seravia is the author of several historical books, *Bernardo de Gálvez: Spanish Hero of the American Revolution* is the author's first English manuscript. English may be the author's second language, but there is no indication in his enjoyable and polished writing. Adding to the book's appeal is the jacket illustration, a reproduction of a late eighteenth-century work of art utilizing painting and calligraphy that depicts Gálvez on horseback. The *Pintura del Excelentísimo Señor Conde de*

*Gálvez* (1796) by Friars Pablo Jesús and Jerónimo, which is displayed in the Museo Nacional de Historia in Chapultepec Castle, honors Gálvez by portraying him on horseback with the horse's front legs in the air, a style traditionally reserved for royalty. Although Gálvez is a relatively well-known figure in Galveston, Texas, and Pensacola, Florida, Quintero Seravia's excellent biography of Gálvez should serve to enlighten those who wish to learn more about this historical figure that played such a crucial role in the American Revolution.

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**Citation:** Michael R. Hall. Review of Quintero Saravia, Gonzalo M., *Bernardo de Gálvez: Spanish Hero of the American Revolution*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. January, 2019.

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